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Urban Governance in Russia: The Case of Moscow Territorial Development and Housing Renovation

MARINA KHMELNITSKAYA & EMMIROSA IHALAINEN

Abstract

This essay considers how the tensions inherent to authoritarian politics structure urban governance in the city of Moscow. The focus here is on urban development policy and the housing renovation programme introduced in 2017. The essay demonstrates a flexible governance arrangement that responds to the interests and ideas of the country's leadership and involves city-level bureaucratic decision-making, the accommodation of economic interests and expert opinion, and consultations with the public. Such consultations have recently become more significant because of intensive protests paired with the city administration's belief in participatory urban governance.

URBAN GOVERNANCE REPRESENTS A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE for an authoritarian regime. The challenge lies in the duality of the relationship between authoritarian political systems and urban dwellers. With their educated, professional and relatively wealthy population, cities are an important source of social support and recruitment for the regime (Linz 2000, p. 187). In addition, non-democratic states use redistributive policies to maintain the support of urban communities (Wallace 2013). Yet, the swelling numbers of urban residents attracted by such policies and the limits imposed by autocracies on the urban middle classes, particularly the more educated and intellectually sophisticated strata, present a long-term threat to regime survival. Thus, paradoxically, the stability of such regimes is often eroded by the very groups that seemingly benefit the most from their rule (Linz 2000, p. 190).

This essay aims to examine the politics of urban governance by a non-democratic regime in contemporary Russia, using the case study of the housing renovation programme in the city of Moscow, initiated in February 2017. Our analysis draws on contemporary literature on authoritarian systems. Recent research underlines the 'dilemmas of

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authoritarian governance’ faced by authoritarian leaders *vis-à-vis* elites and the public, and examines different institutional and participatory forms used to accommodate them (Gandhi 2008; Svolik 2012; Truex 2017). While existing political science research on the Moscow renovation programme underlines the distributive nature and careful design of this policy, allowing the regime to reward its supporters and punish its opponents (Smyth 2018), our argument underscores the consultative aspects of the programme and, therefore, its more spontaneous and flexible character. This character involves the accommodation of different economic and social interests and is influenced by the interests and ideas of both the federal leadership and city-level officials. The elite and public actors involved in the Moscow renovation scheme include a heterogeneous community of urban planners, developers and construction firms, and various groups of city residents who support or oppose the city’s development policies.

Specifically, we show that the renovation programme is a product of the Moscow governance regime that emerged in the 2010s under Mayor Sergey Sobyanin. Following the ‘dilemmas of authoritarian governance’ logic, this regime consults and accommodates the elite (Remington *et al.* 2013; Martus 2017), the public (Cook & Dimitrov 2017; Owen & Bindman 2019) and the expert community. We demonstrate that, with respect to the residents’ policy input, the authorities were prepared to deepen public consultations in response to intensive protest activity. At least part of Sobyanin’s administration support the use of participatory mechanisms in urban development, and its expert advisers were crucial for this shift from superficial to meaningful consultations. We argue that such consultative policy is characteristic of modern urban governance in the city and is part of wider societal governance in contemporary Russia.

Methodologically, exploring the case of Moscow governance and its urban development programmes, we adopt a historical institutionalist approach to the study of policy and politics (Mahoney & Thelen 2010). Using the method of historical process-tracing, we seek to ‘identify the causal mechanism between independent variables and the outcome of the dependent variable’ (George & Bennett 2005, p. 206). Our dependent variable is urban development policy in Moscow; our independent variables include structural conditions, such as economic change; the institutional structure of an authoritarian system, referred to above, which involves the need to maintain the popularity of authoritarian leaders in relation to the public and the elite; and electoral cycles. We consider how these institutional factors affect policy and governance in interaction with actors’ interests and ideas and the values held by the public. Following the historical institutionalist approach, we are also attentive to the timings of different intervening events and the influence of policy legacies. As one urban scholar argues: ‘for the study of cities, time is as important as space. Cities are a precipitate of history. Or, as Henri Lefebvre put it, urban sites represent the “inscription of time in the world”’ (Bender 2010, p. 310).

Our study relies on a diverse range of data. First, it is a result of the authors’ many years of observation of Moscow governance and its territorial development policies, predating the launch of the renovation programme. Interviews and conversations with Muscovites and experts during several fieldwork trips taken during the mid-2010s, formed the background source for this essay. Second, we have used official documents, particularly those produced by the Russian presidency, the federal government, the

Moscow government, the Moscow City *Duma* and the State *Duma*, and the Central Electoral Commission; laws and regulations; official speeches; newspaper reporting, particularly of outlets such as *Kommersant*, *RBK* and *Meduza*, among others; publications by non-state actors such as think tanks; statistical data from Rosstat; and opinion polling by the Levada Centre. Finally, we supplemented these original sources with relevant secondary literature.

We argue three main points in relation to the Moscow programme of housing renovation. First, this programme is a product of a specific and evolving governance regime established in the city. Second, in order to understand the emergence of this programme, we need to examine the policy processes involving policy legacies, actors, ideas, values and temporal intersections of events leading up to its introduction in 2017. Third, when viewed in its historical context, the programme emerges as one of the initiatives of a long-term policy of Moscow territorial development, in which different interests and ideational positions are accommodated in the context of an authoritarian institutional framework.

Theoretical propositions

The programme of housing renovation in the city of Moscow,¹ initiated by Mayor Sergey Sobyenin and approved by President Vladimir Putin in February 2017, has attracted much commentary among the domestic Russian audience and from international observers (see for example, Seddon 2017). The programme promised to introduce significant improvements to the living conditions of many Muscovites, residents of old housing, mostly built in the 1950s and 1960s and colloquially known as *khrushchevki*. These old five-storey buildings were to be demolished and their residents rehoused in new high-rise blocks constructed nearby. The decision provoked much controversy. Mass protests broke out almost immediately after the mayor announced the programme launch, peaked in May 2017 and did not stop until mid-summer.

According to the official narrative, the programme was designed to improve the housing conditions of people living in *khrushchevki* that were beyond feasible repair, given the outdated technologies used in their construction. Nearly 10,000 such buildings were identified throughout Moscow by urban planners. In addition, the Moscow administration emphasised that the programme was, on the one hand, a reaction to thousands of citizens' complaints received by the mayor's office during the 2010s² and was initiated through a request of the deputies of Moscow municipal councils in February 2017 (Golunov 2017). On the other hand, the administration emphasised subsequent public consultations on the programme's particular details. Specifically, voting for or against the inclusion of individual blocks of flats in the programme was established *via* 'Active Citizen', the City

¹Information about the programme can be found on the website of the Mayor of Moscow Office 'Moskovskii standart renovatsii', available at: <https://www.mos.ru/city/projects/renovation/>, accessed 29 April 2021.

²Some 250,000 such complaints were mentioned on the Department of Construction (*Departament Stroitel'stva*) of the Mayor of Moscow Office website, see 'Programma renovatsii goroda Moskvy', available at: <https://www.mos.ru/ds/function/programma-renovacii/programma-renovacii-goroda-moskvi/>, accessed 15 May 2021.

of Moscow's electronic portal,³ and *via* local administrative offices. Other consultative procedures and structures associated with the development of the 'Law on Renovation', adopted on 1 July 2017, were emphasised as well.⁴ These included public hearings in the State *Duma* and its working group with *khrushchevki* residents, formed in June 2017, municipal councils, the Moscow Public Chamber, and the Moscow City *Duma*.⁵

Among critical voices, however, an influential piece of investigative journalism published in *Vedomosti* in May 2017, highlighted flaws in the official reasoning (Vinogradova *et al.* 2017, pp. 20–1). According to the article, titled 'Moscow isn't demolishing the worst [housing]', many buildings included in the programme were located in areas that their residents found comfortable, with better than average provision of local infrastructure, including recreational zones, health and educational facilities, and convenient transport links. The article argued that the dwellers of these *khrushchevki* were alarmed by the uncertainty regarding the quality and location of the replacement accommodation and made the point that residents had demanded major repairs for their buildings rather than overall renovation, as envisaged in the city of Moscow plan. The article implied an economic rationale behind the decision. Razing low-rise buildings in Moscow's inner districts would allow new, higher density blocks to be put up in their place, ensuring hefty profits for the Moscow construction industry, which in 2016 was suffering from the aftermath of the economic downturn.

Further journalistic and then scholarly analyses soon followed. An article in *Meduza*, an online news site (Golunov 2017), argued that the primary rationale behind the programme was political. According to *Meduza*, the programme had been in preparation since 2014 by the Moscow urban planning department, with the aim of improving the quality of housing stock and the urban infrastructure of the capital. However, with the new presidential and mayoral election cycle approaching, the political department seized upon the programme as an opportunity to impress Muscovites with the generosity of the authorities. In a similar vein, an analysis by the well-known geographer, Natalia Zubarevich, emphasised that, as the wealthiest of Russia's regions, Moscow could afford such a large-scale redevelopment project as analysis pointed to the spectacular surplus in the Moscow city budget, which, in the first half of 2017 alone, amounted to R210 billion, allowing the *per capita* spending of the Moscow government to exceed by far that of any other region in the country (Neklessa 2017; Zubarevich *et al.* 2018).

Regina Smyth (2018) develops the political theme further. Her analysis builds on the literature on authoritarian distribution (Magaloni 2006), which argues that targeted social spending is distributed by the regime at the local level to shore up public support. Smyth

³'Aktivnyi grazhdanin', available at: <https://ag.mos.ru/home>, accessed 29 April 2021.

⁴Federal'nyi Zakon N. 141 ot 1 iyulya 2017 goda 'O vnesenii izmenenii v Federal'nyi Zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii "O statuse stolitsy Rossiiskoi Federatsii" i otdel'nye zakonodatel'nye akty Rossiiskoi Federatsii v chasti ustanovleniya osobennostei regulirovaniya otdel'nykh pravootnoshenii v tselyakh renovatsii zhilishchnogo fonda v sub"ekte Rossiiskoi Federatsii—gorode federal'nogo znacheniya Moskve', *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 4 July 2017, available at: <https://rg.ru/2017/07/01/fz141-site-dok.html>, accessed 29 April 2021.

⁵See the section on Moscow renovation 'Moskovskii standart renovatsii', especially sub-sections 'Garantii programmy' and 'Dokumenty', on the official website of the Mayor of Moscow office, available at: <https://www.mos.ru/city/projects/renovation/>, accessed 29 April 2021.

(2018) finds that the regime used the Moscow renovation programme to reward or punish voters who, in the 2013 mayoral elections, voted for opposition candidate Aleksei Naval'nyi. Punishment and reward were articulated through the redistribution of public goods—housing renovation in this case—and that this action was fine-tuned to the level of local municipalities, to echo Beatriz Magaloni's argument. However, Smyth also finds support for the official rationale, that residents of older and poor-quality buildings were to be rehoused. Based on these observations, reached on the basis of a statistical analysis of resident surveys, her study concludes that 'the policy fulfils more than one function' (Smyth 2018, p. 4).

Smyth's perspective resonates with comparative research on urban politics, which studies the long-term effects of redistributive policies favouring cities for the survival of authoritarian regimes. Jeremy Wallace (2013) argues that the overconcentration of the population in capital cities represents a problem for autocracy because tight urban living facilitates collective action against the authorities. Wallace also argues that autocracies tend to enact Faustian-bargain-style policies of redistribution towards cities at the expense of the countryside. In the short run, such policies assuage discontent but are detrimental in the long-term. Rural dwellers seeking a better share of state largesse are attracted to urban areas, with the result that the population density of these areas grows while the resources available *per capita* diminish. High population density leads to the rapid transformation of growing grievances into disruptive anti-regime protests. As a result, Wallace concludes, the life span of autocracies where the population is overconcentrated in the capital city is significantly shorter compared to those that manage to preserve a more decentralised urban structure.

In this essay, we propose to step away from the focus on redistribution, and develop Smyth's observations on the multifunctionality of the Moscow renovation project, with the 'reward and punishment' rationale being only one of many. In order to unpack those extra functions—while keeping in mind that those policy processes are still part of the wider authoritarian governance process—we draw on a different section of the literature on comparative authoritarianism. Specifically, we use the scholarship on the structures that limit authoritarian rule (Boix & Svoblik 2013) and allow regimes using such techniques to survive for longer. This literature argues that autocracies face 'two dilemmas of governance' *vis-à-vis* the elites and the public (Gandhi 2008; Svoblik 2012). The former expect access to rents while the latter look to the regime for the continuous improvement in their wellbeing. Both groups, however, also want to have influence over policy. Jennifer Gandhi writes: 'they are often after more than rents alone. They want participation in policy-making' (Gandhi 2008, p. 71).

Authoritarian institutions are helpful here. Parties and parliaments serve to co-opt opposition groups and provide ways for distributing rents to the elites and the public. These partisan institutions are complemented by a great variety of participatory mechanisms attached to different levels of the state administrative hierarchy. These involve real-time and online consultations with industry, civil society, spontaneous groups within local communities and individual citizens, who are able in this way to put forward their views on the matters of importance (Jayasuriya & Rodan 2007; Truex 2017; Khmel'nitskaya 2017a; Owen & Bindman 2019). This line of argument chimes with the finding of the classic literature on authoritarian regimes that such polities are inherently pluralistic (Linz 2000).

Thus, we intend to test the hypotheses generated by this alternative political science explanation for the programme of housing renovation in Moscow: that this policy was a result of the politics of balance among the elite actors—including the state bureaucracy, intellectual expert communities and business—and the public. Moreover, the use of the historical institutionalist approach (Mahoney & Thelen 2010) allows us to appreciate the long-term, ‘in time’, nature of Moscow urban governance processes in which the renovation programme as such represents only one—albeit a significant—episode. Thus, when examining the programme of urban renovation in Moscow, we consider the politics of balancing different interests and ideas taking place in time, in the context of policy legacies and public attitudes. We argue that such a flexible balancing arrangement is one mechanism of limited authoritarian governance in the city of Moscow and, more broadly, in contemporary Russia, with respect to managing urban politics and winning support among urban communities for the national and city political regime.

The argument contributes to the understanding of the sources of stability and the mechanisms of accommodating preferences in contemporary Russia in the absence of the democratic representation of interests in the political system.

Case study: housing renovation in the city of Moscow

The programme of housing renovation in the city of Moscow, initiated in February 2017, represents one of many in a sequence of policies unfolding in the broad domain of urban development in the Russian capital. To initiate the process-tracing of this case, it is crucial to appreciate ideas and attitudes held by different actors towards urban development. Fundamentally, urban development is linked to the issues of economic, spatial and housing development. Housing development is dominated by a widely shared basic understanding that housing is an important and problematic area that concerns everyone and is connected to demography. Below, we analyse the attitudes and ideas of the main actors involved. In the subsequent sections, we demonstrate how these basic attitudes affected the policy of Moscow territorial development and the formation of the renovation programme.

Attitudes and ideas behind urban development

We start with the public. Broad public attitudes towards housing in Russia stem from several factors. The first is historically low housing mobility rates. On average, Russians live in the same accommodation for nearly 20 years (Burdyak 2015, p. 279),⁶ which is high compared to the average of five–eight years spent in a single dwelling by households in the West.⁷

⁶‘Generations and Gender Survey’, Generations and Gender Programme (GGP), 2021, available at: <https://www.ggp-i.org/>, accessed 30 April 2021.

⁷According to the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) data, the median time spent living in the same dwelling for Russia is 19 years. This figure is seven–eight years for France and Sweden, and five–six years for Australia, for example. The authors are grateful to Aleksandra Burdyak for her help in carrying out calculations on the GGS data. Variable: ‘121y: Yr starting living in current dwelling’, Waves 1 and 2 (‘Generations and Gender Survey’, Generations and Gender Programme (GGP), 2021, available at: <https://www.ggp-i.org/>, accessed 30 April 2021).

Low housing mobility stems from the well-documented housing shortage during the socialist era, which, since the collapse of communism, has been replaced by a shortage of affordable housing throughout the post-socialist space (Tsenkova & Polanska 2014).

Another factor connected to public attitudes relates to the strong civic activism that has developed in the Russian housing sphere. Because housing is expensive, urban land is scarce and subject to complex property rights, and post-Soviet urban development practices have been chaotic, active housing movements have developed in many Russian cities, including Moscow, in response to actions by local authorities that infringe the rights of the residents (Evans 2012; Greene 2014; Argenbright 2016). In Moscow, evictions, demolitions and the destruction of city green areas, such as in the Moscow district of Butovo in the mid-2000s, the *Rechnik* cooperative and the Khimki forest, as the work by Alfred Evans (2012) and Samuel Greene (2014) shows, generated some of the liveliest protests before the electoral fraud protests of December 2011. This is how Greene (2014) describes the housing movement in Moscow:

Although they are rarely written about in the press, and even many experts are unaware of them, the entire history of Putin's Russia has seen several small protests in Moscow every week, most of which involve housing either demolition and/or eviction orders that are perceived as unfair; construction of new residential and commercial buildings in what used to be yards, parks, and playgrounds; failure of local officials to provide adequate maintenance; and so on. (Greene 2014, p. 155).

It may be argued that Russia's contemporary housing movement has historical roots in the Soviet period. While Soviet campaigns to involve citizens in public matters were viewed with scepticism (Gill 2010, p. 88), research shows that there were pockets of genuine participation in the housing sphere. Susan Reid (2018) reveals a sense of authentic public engagement with the urban environment that emerged among the dwellers of the newly constructed *khrushchevki* housing estates from the 1960s onwards. The attitudes and values of urban dwellers with regard to their housing are important in understanding reactions to the Moscow city government's renovation plans.

There are other important actors and ideas that we need to examine in order to understand the programme. Next, we consider the top level of the executive hierarchy. Regarding the Moscow housing renovation project, most relevant are Putin's priorities concerning general economic development and the improvement of the demographic situation. His speeches and policy initiatives, such as his May 2018 post-inauguration decree,⁸ emphasise that the government will prioritise development in terms of economic growth and international competitiveness. Russia's complex demographic situation has been one of Putin's priority themes since his first presidency and is also reflected in the 2018 decree 'On National Goals' (Zubarevich *et al.* 2018). When Putin endorses policy measures to improve housing conditions for families with children, he is making an

⁸See Presidential Decree N. 204 'O natsional'nykh tselyakh i strategicheskikh zadachakh razvitiya Rossiiskoi Federatsii na period do 2024 goda', 7 May 2018, available at: <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/43027>, accessed 5 March 2019.

explicit link between housing development and Russia's demographic crisis of falling birth rates and a population in decline (Khmelnitskaya 2017b).

The Russian president works with many advisers within the presidential administration, the government and its ministries. There are also close advisers working with high-profile think tanks and academic organisations—for example, the Russian Academy for National Economy and Public Administration (*Rossiiskaya Akademiya Narodnogo Khozhaistva i Gosudarstvennoi Sluzhby*—RANEPA), the Higher School of Economics (*Vyssshaya Shkola Ekonomiki*—HSE), the Institute for Contemporary Development (*Institut Sovremennogo Razvitiya*) and the Stolypin Club—and official bodies, such as the Presidential Economic Council. They are usually divided into statist conservatives and liberals (Fortescue 2017). As the literature on policymaking in Russia argues, and in accordance with the theory of controlled authoritarian pluralism advanced here, Putin does not support any of the bureaucratic factions, allowing the competition between them to even out policy differences (Martus 2017; Khmelnitskaya 2017b).

During his tenure (2008–2012), Dmitry Medvedev was generally regarded as a 'caretaker' president and a less effective policymaker than Putin (Martus 2017). Nonetheless, he was associated with several distinct policy priorities, including technology, environmental issues, the modernisation of the economy and public administration using modern approaches to governance, notably e-government, participatory policymaking and implementation involving representatives of the communities affected by policy (Owen & Bindman 2019).

On the level of the ministerial policy bureaucracy, different groups among the ministries have supported policies related to the development of Russian cities and the city of Moscow specifically. For example, over the past decade, the idea of the agglomeration of urban territories has been discussed and plans adopted by the Ministry for Economic Development, with the participation of expert advisers (Argenbright 2018, p. 235). Another idea that has received attention concerns the link between the urban environment and the development of human capital. A National Priority Project curated by the Ministry of Construction (*Minstroy*), 'The Formation of Comfortable Urban Environment', was adopted for the 2017–2024 period.⁹ Its implementation, a collaboration between *Minstroy* and experts from several urban research institutes, such as the Strelka Institute and the Moscow Architecture Institute (MARKHI), aimed at the regeneration of urban areas, particularly in Russia's regions.¹⁰

Moscow is Russia's largest, most prosperous and most unequal city (Zubarevich 2013). In the mid-2000s many policymakers and experts were excited about the idea of turning Moscow into an international financial centre (Sutela 2012, pp. 183–84). As such, Moscow had to compete for a skilled workforce. The plan developed by the Ministry of

⁹The National Project 'Formirovanie komfortnoi gorodskoi sredy', see the project's website available at: <https://gorodsreda.ru/>, accessed 28 April 2021.

¹⁰See 'Proekt Goroda budushchego', on the website of *Dom.RF*, the state mortgage and housing development agency, until 2016 known as the Agency for Home Mortgage Lending (*Agenstvo po Ipotechnomu Zhilishchnomu Kreditovaniyu*), available at: <https://xn--d1aqf.xn--p1ai/urban/projects/urban-improvement/>, accessed 28 April 2021. See also, 'Mediateka' and 'bulleteni' at the website of the *Strelka-KB*, available at: <https://strelka-kb.com/media#media>, accessed 28 April 2021.

Economy in 2008 (Sutela 2012, p. 242) included the improvement of urban infrastructure, environmental conditions, public transportation and international transport links. Such changes were to make the city attractive in the global competition for talent.

Enthusiasm about the opportunities of urban redevelopment, in conjunction with the economic growth of the 2000s, resulted in the emergence of new urban research centres, such as the Strelka Institute, established in 2009, and university departments and study programmes, such as the Higher School of Urbanism (*Vysshaya Shkola Urbanistiki*) of the Faculty for Urban and Regional Development at the HSE¹¹ and graduate programmes run by the Strelka Institute¹² among others,¹³ working alongside research institutes, such as the Institute for Urban Economics (*Institut Ekonomiki Goroda*) that had emerged during the post-communist transition and some that dated back to the Soviet period, for instance the MARKHI and the Institute for the General Plan of Moscow (*Institut Genplana Moskvy*). There were also international cooperation and community initiatives in Moscow, such as the Moscow Urban Forum,¹⁴ online voting platforms (Khmelnitskaya 2017a, p. 324; Gunko *et al.* 2018) and international urban design competitions for the development of specific urban areas and projects, such as Skolkovo (Revzin 2012; Evans 2017).¹⁵

In addition to the policy community concerned with economic and urban development, another group of bureaucratic actors connected to the social ministries—the Ministry of Labour and Social Assistance, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Construction—worked on housing development and demographics. These actors saw affordable and improved housing as a way to increase the living standards of families, with the ultimate goal of providing an incentive for people to have more children. Earlier measures included the 2007 ‘Affordable Housing’ National Project (Khmelnitskaya 2015, pp. 113, 196). In 2018, policymakers developed the national project ‘Demographics’ (Zubarevich *et al.* 2018), which included subsidised mortgages and Maternity Capital benefits,¹⁶ originally part of the ‘Affordable Housing’ Project (Khmelnitskaya 2015, p. 196). Overall, the policymakers’ objectives of improving fertility and the country’s demographic outlook relied on the steady development of the housing sphere: new housing construction and affordable housing finance.

The policy process at the local level

Ideas of national economic, financial, demographic and housing development discussed by federal-level actors were translated at the local level of the city of Moscow, where they

¹¹The website of the Higher School of Urbanism is available at: <https://urban.hse.ru/>, accessed 7 May 2021.

¹²See the website of the Strelka Institute, available at: <https://strelka.com/en/about>, accessed 7 May 2021.

¹³See, ‘Ot redaktsii’, *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 3, 48, 2012, p. 5, available at: <https://strana-oz.ru/2012/3/ot-redakcii>, accessed 7 May 2021.

¹⁴See the Moscow Urban Forum website, particularly the ‘Archive’ section, available at: <https://mosurbanforum.com/archive/>, accessed 7 May 2021.

¹⁵‘Ot redaktsii’, *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 3, 48, 2012, available at: <https://strana-oz.ru/2012/3/ot-redakcii>, accessed 7 May 2021.

¹⁶See ‘Brifing Maksima Topilina po zavershenii zasedaniya prezidiuma Soveta pri Presidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii po strategicheskomu razvitiyu i natsional’nym proektam’, Government of Russia website, 3 September 2018, available at: http://government.ru/dep_news/33838/, accessed 28 February 2019.

created tensions and contestation between expert ideas, economic and political interests. These tensions intersected with the political developments and structural changes in the national economy to produce policy constellations and policy failures that affected urban development in the city, preparing the ground for the introduction of the renovation programme.

We identify three phases in the evolution of our dependent variable, namely the post-2000 making of territorial development policy in Moscow: the first phase of chaotic densification during the leadership of Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, lasting until his dismissal in 2010; the second phase of urban expansion between 2010 and the mid-2010s; and the third phase, comprising a new round of urban densification under the 2017 renovation programme. Throughout the three stages, the ideas and interests of elite, bureaucratic and expert actors were influential. Yet, the degree of influence of different sub-groups within the bureaucratic and expert community during the three stages varied. The key difference between the stages, however, lies in the extent to which the preferences of the Moscow public were accommodated in the city's development plans.

Chaotic densification

At the local level in Moscow, in the late 2000s there was intense competition over the development of the new Moscow general city plan, *Genplan*.¹⁷ During the 2000s, President Putin had an uneasy relationship with the mayor of Moscow, the charismatic and controversial Yuri Luzhkov. The tension dated back to Putin's ascent to power and the competition between the pro-Putin Unity Party (*Edinstvo*) and the bloc of regional governors, Fatherland-All Russia (*Otechestvo-Vsya Rossiya*—OVR). This tension between the federal centre (Putin) and the mayor of Moscow (Luzhkov) added an edge to the local level plans and policies. The *Genplan* represented the culmination of two simultaneous and difficult tasks—building affordable housing for Muscovites and turning Moscow into a 'world city'—in the context of the scarcity of free urban land in the city.

Two competing expert ideas were urban densification—the development of the city within its existing boarder—or urban expansion, intended here as the development of the city beyond its boundaries. These options reflect the two basic modes of urban development in response to population growth and economic development, as reflected in the writings of urban scholars (Touati-Morel 2015). The distinction between 'densifiers' and 'expansionists' has long roots in the Russian urban development tradition and resembles intellectual debates taking place in the 1920s between 'urbanists' and the 'de-urbanists' (Gill 2010, p. 81).

¹⁷The General Plan for the development of the city of Moscow, in short '*Genplan*', is a long-term urban planning document dating back to the Soviet period. The first *Genplan* was adopted in 1935, followed by 1952 and 1971 *Genplans*. The first post-Soviet Moscow *Genplan* was adopted in 1999 following a lengthy process and replacing interim urban development documents adopted in the early 1990s. The latest at the time of writing was the 2010 *Genplan*. The key research organisation responsible for the development of these documents was the Moscow Genplan Institute (*Institut Genplana Moskvy*) established in 1951. See the historical detail on the institute's website, available at: <https://genplanmos.ru/institute/history/>, accessed 8 May 2021. See also Gill (2010).

The fortunes of the two ideas and their expert advocates were closely related to the Moscow socio-economic context (Zubarevich 2013). Property prices in Moscow were the highest in the country. According to Rosstat, the price of one square metre of housing in Moscow in 2019 was on average R158,000, whereas in the rest of the country housing cost around R53,000 on average.¹⁸ House prices in the capital were, in other words, triple compared to what they were in the rest of the country. Average monthly earnings, by contrast, were only twice as high; R66,000 in Moscow compared to R33,000 in Russia on average in 2018.¹⁹ Moreover, inequality in the capital was higher than anywhere else in the country. Generally, 64.9% of Russians had incomes below their regional average, whereas for Moscow it was nearly 70%.²⁰

In addition, many Muscovite frustrations related to the housing sphere. Many people, even though they owned their apartments, were cash-poor and could not afford to improve their housing or move to more suitable dwellings. Purchasing housing in the capital was an insurmountable challenge. Government policies providing mortgage assistance to families with children were of limited help in Moscow unless the city could find a way to build more affordable accommodation.²¹ In addition, Moscow residence carried reputational benefits and Muscovites were reluctant to move to the suburbs or other regions where prices were lower. There was public outrage when one Moscow property developer suggested that the capital was for the rich and that those who could not afford to buy there should ‘get out and smell the lilacs’ in more affordable locations.²²

Another important trend, noted earlier, was that the urban development of Moscow during the mayoral tenure of Yuri Luzhkov became highly contentious. The policy process concerning urban development primarily accommodated the interests of the economic elite, the city administration and wealthier Muscovites who were able to purchase housing at high Moscow prices. During the 1990s and 2000s, these interests were met through chaotic ‘densification’, also referred to as ‘pin-point’ construction (*tochechnaya zastroika*), when given the lack of free urban space new buildings were constructed in the immediate and often dangerous vicinity of the existing housing,

¹⁸The price of a square metre in accommodation of an ‘ordinary/average’ quality in the secondary market in the second quarter of 2019. See, ‘Tseny na rynke zhil’ya’ section of Rosstat’s ‘Tseny’ section available at: <https://rosstat.gov.ru/price>, accessed 9 May 2021; Edinaya Mezhhvedomstvennaya Informatsionno-statisticheskaya sistema (EMISS), available at: <https://www.fedstat.ru/indicator/31452>, accessed 10 May 2021.

¹⁹Average monthly earnings in 2018, see ‘Uroven’ zhizni’ section of *Rosstat*, available at: <https://www.gks.ru/folder/13397>, accessed 10 May 2021.

²⁰See Rosstat, Table: ‘Doliya naseleniya imeushchego srednedushevye denezhnye dokhody nizhe granits, ustanovlennyykh na osnovanii fakticheskogo urovnya denezhnykh dokhodov naseleniya (srednedushevogo, mediannogo i modal’nogo) v tselom po Rossiiskoi Federatsii i po sub’ektam Rossiiskoi Federatsii’, available at: https://gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/population/bednost/tab1/tab-bed2-7.htm, accessed 16 October 2019.

²¹The Maternity Capital subsidy, a lump sum benefit to every mother who had or adopted a second child, originally introduced as part of the ‘Affordable Housing’ National Project in 2007 (Khmelnitskaya 2015, p. 196) was the central government policy of monetary support for families with their housing needs. In 2007 the size of the benefit was R250,000 and by 2015–2019 it increased to R457,000 (Meleshkina 2020). Yet, this sum had significantly weaker purchasing power in Moscow given its property prices compared to other regions.

²²A reference to a common complaint, particularly among pensioners, about the poor environmental conditions and air quality in the city. Author’s interview with a local resident, Moscow, 6 July 2014.

destroying parks, playgrounds and recreational areas around it, as per the quote we referred to earlier (Greene 2014, p. 155). Less affluent local residents protested virulently against the authorities' plans and claimed that corruption was the primary motive for the urban development projects. Arrests, intimidation and selective accommodation of urban protestors' demands represented the key tactics applied by the city government (Greene 2014; Argenbright 2016).

By the late 2000s, the neglect of public interest in city development policies fed into an overall deeply unsatisfying situation in Moscow for the federal leadership. In addition to the old feud between Putin and Luzhkov, the electoral concerns for the capital were an important consideration. The vote share of United Russia (*Edinaya Rossiya*) in the parliamentary elections of December 2007 in Moscow was well below the country average of 64.3%. In some Moscow districts, it was as low as 40.4%.²³ During the presidential election of March 2008, the picture varied greatly from one city district to another.²⁴ Overall, Moscow electorates reported some of the ruling regime's lowest results in the entire country. The unpopularity of city development policies and the unaffordability of housing were visibly eroding support for the regime (Reuter & Robertson 2012). Because of public resistance to urban development projects, bureaucratic elites found it difficult to implement policy plans and construction, a concern for economic elites, was often stymied by public scandals (for example, Mamaeva 2020). In light of the 'dilemma of authoritarian leaders', according to which elite actors and the public need to be rewarded and occasionally consulted, the regime needed to provide affordable housing for ordinary Muscovites and land on which the construction industry could build this housing and undertake other construction projects.

These circumstances made the city administration receptive to alternative ideas for the city development. The proposal in circulation among one of the expert groups, the 'expansionists', was to extend Moscow's territory beyond the current city boundaries (Appenzeller & Glazychev 2012; Glazychev 2012; Lezhava 2012; Revzin 2012; Mamaeva 2020).²⁵ Expansionists saw such development as an acknowledgement of the already existing agglomeration in the Moscow region. These experts believed that developing 'greenfield' sites, without complex property rights and with better environmental conditions, would allow for the construction of new and attractive housing that would serve the needs of the Moscow public. Furthermore, the parallel development

²³For instance, in the West of Moscow, in *Sokol* district, the vote share for the United Russia was 40.9%; in *Begovoi* district, 43.9%; and *Aeroport*, 43.8%. See 'Vybornye deputatov Gosudarstvennoi Dumi pyatogo sozyva 2007, Dannye svodnoi tablitsy TSIK Rossii o resul'tatakh vyborov deputatov Gosudarstvennoi Dumi', *Tsentral'naya Izbiratel'naya Komissiya Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, date of voting 2 December 2007, available at: http://www.cikrf.ru/banners/elect_duma/results/index.php, accessed 11 May 2021.

²⁴Voting results for some city districts were below 60% (for example, Gagarinsky district, 57%) with a Russia average of 70.28% vote share for Dmitry Medvedev. See, 'Vybornye Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii 2008, Dannye svodnoi tablitsy TSIK Rossii o resul'tatakh vyborov Prezidenta', *Tsentral'naya Izbiratel'naya Komissiya Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, date of voting 2 March 2008, available at: http://www.cikrf.ru/banners/elect_president/results/index.php, accessed 11 May 2021.

²⁵See also, 'Tem vremenem s Aleksandrom Arkhangel'skim: rasshirenie Moskvy', *Kul'tura*, 2011, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNx7N4ahKZI>, accessed 18 May 2021; 'Ot redaktsii', *Otechestvennye zapiski*, 3, 48, 2012, available at: <https://strana-oz.ru/2012/3/ot-redakcii>, accessed 7 May 2021.

of transport infrastructure would permit the creation of new workplaces, promote entrepreneurship and reduce commute traffic, thus also serving the interests of business.

However, a majority of experts and city bureaucrats were against the plan and continued to support the ‘densification’ option as more sustainable and appropriate for a modern city. Experts at the influential Moscow Genplan Institute, the key research organisation responsible for the development of Moscow *Genplans*, argued that expansion was the worst possible option (Argenbright 2018, p. 222). The Institute for Urban Economics argued that Moscow had already been growing in an unsustainable manner, with the new-build high-rises on its periphery lacking the necessary transport and infrastructure (Kosareva 2015). The advice from the ‘densifiers’ was for the city to find internal territories for sustainable urban development, such as in the redevelopment of the areas occupied by older buildings and obsolete industrial zones, as argued by the Institute for the Land Use (Argenbright 2018, p. 222). However, ‘densification’ had a bad reputation due to the uncontrolled policy of chaotic pin-point construction under Luzhkov and politically this was a tough policy idea to implement.

Thus, the expansionist view seemed politically more feasible for the Moscow leadership. It was partially adopted in the Moscow Genplan 2010 creating two new territories beyond the ring road to the west of Moscow. The construction industry was lobbying to build in these prestigious areas.²⁶ Developers hoped that the land in the new enclaves beyond the ring road would be free from complex property rights and local residents’ discontent that had stymied development within the city boundaries (Mamaeva 2020).

The timing of the late 2000s was significant. This decision by Luzhkov’s administration to make more land available for housing construction was a response to the effects on Russia and Moscow of the global financial crisis of 2008, which strained the Moscow budget and Luzhkov’s machine politics. Because of the crisis, there was less public funding available for social projects in the Russian capital and the business elite had less money for new developments. One social project that had to be suspended was Luzhkov’s original programme of *khrushchevki* rehousing initiated by the city of Moscow in 1999 and suspended in 2010, well in advance of its planned closure scheduled for 2013/2014 (Gunko *et al.* 2018, pp. 304–5).

Luzhkov’s administration was also under the pressure of the federal leadership. By the second half of the 2000s, Putin had consolidated his power within elite networks (Baturó & Elkins 2016). This meant that the federal leadership could go after the powerful and independent Luzhkov, especially since, by the late 2000s, neither the local elites nor the public retained much affection for him. Luzhkov was dismissed in September 2010 in the midst of an acute housing dispute over the *Rechnik* cooperative on the western outskirts of Moscow. At the time, the city administration accused the owners of summer cottages (*dachas*) of illegally taking over the city land and attempted to demolish their properties to give way for elite housing construction (Khmelnitskaya 2015, p. 9).²⁷

Thus, during the first phase leading up to the adoption of the Moscow Genplan 2010, key causal factors for the urban development policy were the interests and ideas of the federal

²⁶On Moscow ‘vectors of prestige’, see Gunko *et al.* (2018).

²⁷‘Moscow and Russia: Luzhkov vs. Kremlin’, *The Economist*, 6 February 2010, p. 41.

leadership and bureaucracy, as well as those of the local level political, administrative and economic elites and the group of expert actors supporting expansion. The timing of structural economic changes was also a significant influence on urban policy decisions. However, the Moscow public were largely excluded from the process and decisions about city development were made on their behalf by the expert community.

The new Moscow

The next phase in the development of urban policy began with the appointment of a city manager, Sergey Sobyenin, soon after Luzhkov's dismissal in October 2010. With previous experience as the head of the Presidential Administration and regional governor of Tyumen', Sobyenin was the regime's appointee to run the complex capital. The policies of Sobyenin's early mayorship reflected the specific ideas of national development cherished by President Medvedev: innovation, technological modernisation, transparency in government and public participation. The emphasis on public participation—which as we will show, remained essentially symbolic—was the key feature setting this new phase of Moscow development apart from the earlier one.

Under Sobyenin, from 2010 onwards, diverse forms of consultation and communication and the engagement of different communities, such as students and professionals, both national and international, have been attempted in connection to the development of city plans (Revzin 2012; Evans 2017; Khmel'nitskaya 2017a, pp. 324, 326). The new approach was assisted by the appearance of new actors and ideas. A new Moscow chief architect Sergei Kuznetsov was appointed in 2012.²⁸ Such connections linked the city administration to the community of urban experts behind the Moscow Urban Forum and the Strelka Institute, with their ideals of connectivity, smart city technology and public participation. Zhelnina (*forthcoming*) writes that the Strelka Institute became the city administration's key partner and supplier of ideas for Moscow urban development. A constellation of economic factors, power politics and policy preferences of the country's top leadership determined the timing that allowed the temporary flourishing of key ideas—the development of eco-friendly urban environment with less intensive commuter traffic, convenient public transport, and the development of professional and technological 'clusters' with housing available near to the places of work.

Such ideas resulted in a change in the treatment of the Moscow public. Robert Argenbright writes of the differences in Luzhkov's and Sobyenin's approaches to city governance: 'Sobyenin's government ... has been smarter, respectful of the citizenry, and much more open to public opinion' (Argenbright 2016, p. 112). Yet, such consultative forms often were of a formal character and concerned insignificant issues, whether to leave the autumn leaves on the city lawns, how to name the local 'centre of culture'²⁹ or the sports to be included in a family winter games competition (Gunko *et al.* 2018;

²⁸See Sergei Kuznetsov's biography on the Moscow Committee for Architecture and City Planning (*Komitet po Arkhitekture i Gradostroitel'stvu goroda Moskvy*) website, available at: <https://www.mos.ru/mka/structure/person/19404093/>, accessed 12 May 2021.

²⁹See 'Nazvanie dlya kul'turnogo tsentra v rayone Strogino', Active Citizen website (*Aktivniy Grazhdanin*), available at: <https://ag.mos.ru/news/5636>, accessed 12 May 2021.

Zhel'nina forthcoming).³⁰ They nevertheless represented a step change from the Luzhkov era of public disengagement, intimidation and violence against Muscovites protesting over urban issues. Sobyenin's caution in relation to the sensitive issue of Moscow territorial development was evident in the fact that when he assumed office, 'the issuance of new permits for construction was suspended, while most previously agreed contracts were terminated. As a result, the pace of mass housing construction reduced threefold by 2012: initiation of new projects became very rare' (Gunko *et al.* 2018, p. 297). This was not because elite interests had been written off overnight by Sobyenin's government, but because an alternative solution for accommodating them was found. In order to ease pressure on inner-city land, Luzhkov's solution in the Genplan 2010, a small-scale extension, was taken to the next level. A massive expansion of city boundaries—officially called 'Greater Moscow' (*Bol'shaya Moskva*), as the 'New Moscow'—was initiated in June 2011 by presidential decree and completed in July 2012, when the technical specifications were adopted. As a result, the territory of Moscow expanded by two and a half times (Argenbriht 2018, p. 223; Gunko *et al.* 2018, p. 297).

Expansion seemed a workable way out of tensions within the city over urban land. It allowed both the elites eager for profitable opportunities to build in Moscow and Muscovites in need of better housing a chance to buy within Moscow. In other words, the expansion served the interests of the federal leadership and the Moscow city administration. For the former, it offered a solution to 'authoritarian governance dilemmas' by rewarding elites and providing policy outputs to the public. For the city leadership, it offered a way to 'deliver the votes' (Rundlett & Svolik 2016) and thus secure the support of the top leadership. The policy was moreover based on the advice of those experts among the urban specialist community who favoured expansion. The policy was framed as socially useful, accommodating Muscovites with different income levels and allowing them a choice of housing options in the capital. The city administration had high hopes for the economic development linked to the new territories (Argenbriht 2011).

The influence of the construction industry is the most popular explanation for the Moscow extension of the early 2010s, as it had been under Mayor Luzhkov and, as we shall show, with regard to the 2017 renovation programme. For instance, as prominent architect, Yuri Bocharov (2013) argued, the *Bol'shaya Moskva* project was the primary result of intensive lobbying by the construction industry and of the corruption of the city bureaucracy. Similarly, Argenbriht writes: 'Firms saw green-field sites which could become available with the expansion of Moscow, very attractive' (Argenbriht 2018, pp. 221–22). The fact that many sources point to the industry interests being behind both the expansion and densification plans suggests that elite interests were carefully accommodated and rewarded in both scenarios. The construction industry, meanwhile, appeared to care primarily for business opportunities and was largely indifferent towards the competing visions of urban redevelopment. Our own survey of publications related to lobbying by the Moscow construction industry also demonstrates that, since the late

³⁰See 'Golosoovanie: Vybor sorevnovanii dlya ezhegodnykh zimnikh sostiazanii "Zimnie Starty"', Active Citizen website, available at: <https://ag.mos.ru/results/3541>, accessed 12 May 2021.

2000s, construction firms intensively lobbied for projects in ‘old’ Moscow as well as in its new territories.³¹

While expert opinion and elite interests found their way into the New Moscow development plans, the voices of Muscovites themselves were largely absent. In fact, contrary to the expectations of the federal and city leadership, Muscovites did not take to the idea of the extension (Levada Centre 2012).

Furthermore, implementation was a problem. As several years passed, most of the innovative projects associated with New Moscow remained on paper. This included the development of technological clusters, the relocation of government offices—according to the polls, the only part of the plan approved by Muscovites (Levada Centre 2012)—and the construction of transportation links to serve the new territories (Argenbright 2018).

The timing of intervening events was again significant. The evolving national political setting presented further challenges to the federal authorities, with Moscow, physically and metaphorically, at the heart of it all. During the winter of 2011–2012, mass protests in large cities shook the country (Greene 2014; Petrov *et al.* 2014). Protests by Moscow’s ‘angry urbanites’ were by far the largest (Zubarevich 2013), demonstrating to the national leadership that its low popularity in the capital was not fundamentally altered by the ‘consultative turn’ in the city governance. The president’s approval ratings in Moscow in July 2012 were just 27%, while 31% of respondents expressed an overall negative view of Putin (Levada Centre 2012).

The rift between the public and officials of all levels also revealed itself during the mayoral elections of September 2013. The opposition candidate Aleksei Naval’nyi ran an impressive campaign against Sobyanin, and despite the administrative resources of the latter, received 27.4% share of vote. Sobyanin won, nevertheless, with 51.37% of votes.³² Another structural influence was the deterioration of the general economic situation, with the drop in the price of oil in late 2014 and the imposition of international sanctions following Russia’s annexation of Crimea. As a consequence, a robust economic growth could no longer be a source of regime legitimization to the extent that it was in the 2000s, and that there were fewer resources for state and private investment.

New densification: the Moscow renovation programme

The effect of the above political and economic regime challenges for the Moscow urban development policy, were as follows. New-built apartments in New Moscow were selling slowly and construction firms were failing to make expected profits (Gerashchenko & Mertsalova 2018, p. 11). Muscovites were not keen on moving beyond the city’s former boundaries. Similarly, people from outside of Moscow were not keen on buying in

³¹A data set of 25 journalistic articles in leading business newspapers including *Kommersant*, *Ekspert* and *Forbes* covering 2005–2017. Available from the authors.

³²In some districts vote share for Naval’nyi was almost as high as for Sobyanin, for example, Sokol district with results of 37% and 39% respectively, see: ‘Vybory mera Moskvyy, svodnaya tablitsa resul’tatov’, Central Electoral Commission of Russia website, date of voting 8 September 2013, available at: http://www.moscow-city.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/moscow_city?action=show&root=1&tvd=27720001368293&vm=27720001368289®ion=77&global=&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=27720001368293&type=222, accessed 12 May 2021.

Moscow's new territories as these did not offer the reputational benefits of 'old' Moscow. A less robust economy and other competing mega-projects, such as the Sochi Olympics, drew away government funding. In this context the city administration lost faith in the 'New Moscow' (Argenbright 2018, p. 229).

This setting ushered in a new stage in the city's development, its pinnacle programme of housing renovation. However, like the previous phase, plans were drawn up by city bureaucrats and experts, and public influence remained minimal. Public influence over policy only became significant later, as events surrounding the renovation programme unfolded.

Against the background of disappointment with the idea of expansion, the expert community of 'densifiers' continued to insist that the 'New Moscow' model of territorial development needed to be revised and that new housing construction should take place inside the old city borders (Kosareva 2015). This found support among officials, as testified by the debates and justification for the densification plans put forward during meetings held at the Moscow City *Duma* and the Public Chamber in February 2017, the month when the outline of the renovation plan³³ was publicly unveiled (Zheltnina forthcoming). This was to be achieved through a programme of what urban scholars would describe as 'demolition-based regeneration' (Zhou 2017) within Moscow's pre-expansion boundaries.

Thus, the Department for Urban Policy and Construction (*Stroykomplex*) of the Moscow city administration,³⁴ led by Marat Khusnullin, from late 2014 worked on an elaborate district-by-district plan of territorial renovation through densification (Golunov 2017). The development of territories rather than 'pin-point' construction represented a qualitative change from the Luzhkov-era approach both towards city densification and the reconstruction of the five-storey *khrushchevki*, both of which concerned construction and demolition of individual buildings. Demolition-based regeneration would free up 'neighbourhoods' of 'old' Moscow by demolishing low-rise buildings and replacing them with high-rises. Residents—most of whom owned their apartments—would be rehoused in new apartments, which Sobyanin suggested would be located in the same districts,³⁵ and the rest of the new apartments were to be sold at market price. The new approach

³³ At the time when Sobyanin presented the programme to Putin during a meeting on 21 February 2017, the programme was referred to as 'the renovation programme' (*programma renovatsii*). See 'Sobytiya: vstrecha s merom Moskv Sergeyem Sobyanim', President of Russia website, 21 February 2017, available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53915>, accessed 13 May 2021. Once the bill about the renovation programme was submitted to the State *Duma* on 10 March 2017, its official title became 'O vnesenii izmenenii v zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii "O Statuse Stolitsy"', see 'Sistema obespecheniya zakonodatel'noy deyatel'nosti: Zakonoproekt N. 120505-7', State *Duma* website, available at: <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/120505-7>, accessed 13 May 2021. Colloquially the public and official discussion continued to refer to this initiative as the 'renovation programme' (*programma renovatsii*).

³⁴ See the composition of the Moscow government which includes the 'Division for Urban Policy and Construction' (*Kompleks gorodskoi politiki i stroitel'stva goroda Moskvy*), at the portal *Elektronnaya Moskva*, available at: <http://mosopen.ru/government/3>, accessed 4 June 2020.

³⁵ At the meeting with Vladimir Putin. See, 'Sobytiya: vstrecha s merom Moskv Sergeyem Sobyanim', President of Russia website, 21 February 2017, available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53915>, accessed 13 May 2021.

also served elite interests, namely, property developers, who gained an opportunity to build in ‘old’ Moscow where demand was high.

A seemingly ‘win-win’ plan designed by the administration for the Moscow public and the elite while also responding to those experts who felt sidelined by the adoption of the expansionist view made Sobyanin confident in publicising the plan. This was significant in the context of the approaching new round of presidential elections in 2018 (Seddon 2017) and the pressure on local officials to ‘deliver the vote’. The solution to the Moscow development problem, that is, demolition-based regeneration, appeared so attractive that it was given publicity at the federal level by President Putin himself by literally saying ‘Let’s do it!’ (*Khorosho, davaite sdelaem*) to Sergey Sobyanin’s proposal of the programme plan on 21 February 2017 (Smyth 2018).³⁶ Given the president’s careful style in policy matters, such an endorsement of a specific policy must have been based on a convincing assurance by the Moscow officials that the programme would be welcomed by the public and increase the leadership’s popularity in the capital.

Sroykomplex, which was responsible for the programme, had several branches with their own agendas and inclinations. Those branches, including the department for urban policy (*Departament Gradostroitel’noi Politiki*) and the department for construction (*Departament Stroitel’sтва goroda Moskvy*), involved with the construction industry had greater influence over policy than its architectural department (*Moskomarkhitektury*). The latter supported ideas of public participation and was linked to the Strelka Institute, MARKHI and the Moscow Genplan Institute and their work on innovations in urban development, such as *Goroda budushchego* (‘city of the future’).³⁷ Given the lesser influence of the *Moskomarkhitektury* faction, the idea of public consultation was included in the renovation programme but only as window dressing, much in line with the approach taken during the preceding phase.

Thus, the Moscow administration gave an impression of involving several representative bodies and consultative structures, such as the municipal councils, the Moscow City *Duma* and the Moscow Public Chamber in the planning of the programme in February 2017 (Zhelnina forthcoming). Yet, such consultations mainly involved experts and were too brief, and public participation at this stage was more theatrical than meaningful. For instance, the programme was nominally ‘requested’ by the municipal council deputies during a meeting with Sobyanin in early February (Golunov 2017). The inadequacy of such a consultation mode to gauge public opinion on the programme would become obvious in spring 2017, when the reactions of Muscovites became more visible as the programme had begun its approval through the State *Duma*, as noted below.

At the early stage, however, after Putin’s endorsement, Sobyanin’s administration promptly moved the policy process forward. This process consisted of two elements: the

³⁶See the minutes of the meeting between Vladimir Putin and Sergey Sobyanin, ‘Sobytiya: Vstrecha s Merom Moskvy Sergeem Sobyanim’, President of Russia website, 21 February 2017, available at: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53915>, accessed 13 May 2021.

³⁷See ‘Proekt Goroda budushchego’, on the website of *Dom.RF*, available at: <https://xn--7sbefdedi9eahp8bb4g.xn-p1ai/results>, accessed 16 June 2020 and <https://xn--d1aqf.xn-p1ai/urban/projects/urban-improvement/>, accessed 28 April 2021. See also ‘Mediateka’ and ‘bulleteni’ on the website of the *Strelka-KB*, available at: <https://strelka-kb.com/media#media>, accessed 28 April 2021.

adoption of a federal law (formally, amendments to the Law on the Capital spelling out the details of the renovation policy) and the Renovation Programme, containing the list of buildings to be demolished.³⁸ On 10 March 2017, a bill on Renovation was introduced to the State *Duma* by a group of Moscow deputies from the Construction and Transportation Committee, who were joined by several other parliamentary committees, including the Committee on Housing Policy, headed by a Just Russia (*Spravedlivaya Rossiya*) deputy, Galina Khovanskaya, a prominent expert on housing issues. Parliamentarians formed a working group to coordinate their work.³⁹

Between early March and 20 April, when the first reading of the bill took place in the *Duma*, Moscow officials and supporters of the bill in the *Duma* put forward their view of the renovation programme.⁴⁰ They did so using technical language, presenting a positive, futuristic vision of a renovated Moscow. New housing would be constructed using the latest green, energy efficient technology. With more quality housing available within Moscow's former boundaries, traffic congestion and air quality would improve. Given the dilapidated state of the *khreshchevki*, renovation would have to progress quickly. For that the construction process had to be speeded up, from the initial 1,200-plus days to around 700 days. Such a drastic reduction necessitated cutting red tape, deemed to be 'unnecessary' by the policy designers, inspections and approvals. For example, public hearings—envisaged in the existing regulation⁴¹ and taking a considerable amount of time—could be arranged using digital methods, in particular 'Active Citizen', the Moscow government's electronic portal, during the programme's adoption and later during its implementation. Following this procedure, residents of the 7,937 buildings included on the renovation list, published in early March, would be able to vote online for the inclusion of their buildings in the programme. The voting was scheduled to take place between 15 May and 15 June 2017.⁴² Once the programme was underway, the rehousing to new apartments would be arranged promptly, within 60 days' notice.⁴³

³⁸Federal'nyi Zakon N. 141 ot 1 iyulya 2017 goda 'O vnesenii izmenenii v Federal'nyi Zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii 'O statuse stolitsy Rossiiskoi Federatsii' i otdel'nye zakonodatel'nye akty Rossiiskoi Federatsii v chasti ustanovleniya osobennostei regulirovaniya otdel'nykh pravootnoshenii v tselyakh renovatsii zhilishchnogo fonda v sub''ekte Rossiiskoi Federatsii—gorode federal'nogo znacheniya Moskve', *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 4 July 2017, available at: <https://rg.ru/2017/07/01/fz141-site-dok.html>, accessed 29 April 2021.

³⁹For the passage of the bill on Renovation through the State *Duma* during the 2017 spring session, including speeches by *Duma* deputies during the three readings, see, <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/120505-7>, accessed 4 June 2020.

⁴⁰For instance, Sergey Sobyenin's presentation at the Council of the State *Duma* meeting, 'Sergey Sobyenin obsudil programmu renovatsii zhil'ya na rasshirennom zasedanii Soveta Gosudarstvennoi Dumy', 4 April 2017, available at: https://www.mos.ru/mayor/themes/153299/3914050/?onsite_molding=3, accessed 4 June 2020.

⁴¹Public hearings were part of the 2005 Urban Code and of the 2003 Law on Local Self-governance.

⁴²See 'Programma renovatsii goroda Moskvy', Department of Construction (*Departament Stroitel'stva*) of the Mayor of Moscow Office website, available at: <https://www.mos.ru/ds/function/programma-renovatsii/programma-renovatsii-goroda-moskvi/>, accessed 15 May 2021.

⁴³In addition to Sergey Sobyenin's presentation at the Council of the State *Duma* meeting, 4 April 2017, available at: https://www.mos.ru/mayor/themes/153299/3914050/?onsite_molding=3, accessed 4 June 2020, see an address by State *Duma* deputy Nikolai Gonchar (United Russia), one of the authors of the bill on renovation, introducing the bill during its first reading at the State *Duma*, plenary session 40, 20 April 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017a).

Despite the expectations of the mayor's office that the programme would be popular, it caused an uproar. Protests continued throughout spring 2017. The largest of them attracted between 20,000 and 30,000 people to Prospekt Sakharova on 14 May (Vinogradova *et al.* 2017, pp. 20–1). For years, Muscovites were accustomed to the localised instances of the violation of their housing rights: through the renovation programme, they came to be confronted with the same instance of regime injustice. Their response resulted in one of the largest protest actions the city has seen in its recent history.⁴⁴ By contrast to the Luzhkov era, there were no reports of official violence against the protesters. Beside protesting, Muscovites sent thousands of complaints to the Moscow government and petitioned their municipal deputies.⁴⁵

Muscovites were surprised and shocked to find their apartment blocks in the list of 8,000 buildings initially included in the programme. Opaque criteria came to be adopted to shape this list: some sturdy buildings were part of the programme, while dilapidated ones were left off (Seddon 2017; Zhelnina *forthcoming*). The precise location of new housing, its internal design (*remont*), the available infrastructure and environmental conditions all generated questions. For instance, people demanded a precise definition of the term 'equal housing' (*ravnoznachnoe*), where they were to be resettled from their *khrushchevki* apartments and insisted that they should receive equally priced properties (*ravnoitsennoe zhil'e*) instead.⁴⁶

Unlike the technical discourse of the Moscow administration, the public and their supporters expressed their questions, frustrations and distrust in simple terms. For them, the project was anti-constitutional, violating their right to a home, to private property and to legal defence in court, because the renovation bill stipulated that *khrushchevki* residents would move to new apartments at 60 days' notice, prohibiting fighting the rehousing decision in court.⁴⁷ People worried that they were to be rehoused into 'cow sheds' (*v korovniki*) and 'in the middle of nowhere' (*na kudykinu goru*),⁴⁸ implying the New Moscow new built housing that was unsold and stood empty. Others saw the programme as a new, super-sized version of the Luzhkov-era 'pin-point construction', as argued by Sergey Shargunov, a Communist Party *Duma* deputy, during the first reading of the Renovation bill.⁴⁹ As one participant in the 14 May protest at Prospekt Sakharova put it: 'even in the 1990s, they weren't this blatant' (Chernykh & Tyazhlov 2017, p. 1).

⁴⁴Similarly, citizens in electoral autocracies, Tucker (2007) argues, are confronted with the same instance of regime injustice when the regime rigs elections. Electoral fraud then becomes a 'focal event' provoking mass post-election protests.

⁴⁵See for instance addresses by the State *Duma* deputies Galina Khovanskaya (Just Russia), Petr Tolstoy (United Russia) and Tamara Pletneva (KPRF) at the first reading of the renovation bill at the State *Duma*, plenary session 40, 20 April 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017a); also Buranov and Aminov (2017).

⁴⁶Addresses by the State *Duma* deputies Tamara Pletneva (KPRF) and Galina Khovanskaya (Just Russia) during the first reading of the renovation bill at State *Duma* plenary session 40, 20 April 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017a).

⁴⁷Address by State *Duma* deputies Petr Tolstoy, Valeriy Gartung and Galina Khovanskaya during the first reading of the renovation bill, plenary session 40, 20 April 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017a).

⁴⁸See address by State *Duma* deputy Sergey Shargunov (KPRF) during the first reading of the renovation bill, plenary session 40, 20 April 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017a).

⁴⁹Sergey Shargunov and also Valery Rashkin (KPRF) during the first reading of the renovation bill, 20 April 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017a).

Overall, the public believed the programme was a smokescreen to hide the influence of the construction industry. The Renovation Fund (*Fond Sodeistviya Renovatsii*) envisaged in the bill lacked transparency. For example, it was not clear if rehousing would be carried out by the developers—as was the case during Luzhkov’s significantly more modest programme of *khrushchevki* resettlement—or by the Moscow government, with the industry carrying out the renovation as subcontractors. Voting via the ‘Active Citizen’ or the local administrative offices (*Multi-funktional’nye tsentry gosudarstvennykh uslug*—MFTs) instead of conducting public hearings of the project, was seen as an inadequate mechanism to gauge the public’s response about such a life-defining issue as their homes. Moreover, people did not want to vote before the law had been passed and its terms were clear.⁵⁰

While dismissing the protests as incited by entrenched interests of bureaucratic actors who were to lose from the renovation programme,⁵¹ the Moscow administration attempted to mollify the opposition by revising some parts of the programme. For example, officials returned to the original list of 8,000 buildings included in the programme, working from resident surveys, complaints and feedback from municipal deputies (Buranov & Aminov 2017, p. 1). They also tried to better communicate the policy to the Muscovites, as, for instance, during meetings with the heads of municipal district administrations (*upravy*) held on 19 April, on the eve of the first *Duma* reading of the draft law. Yet, ‘people came to these meetings worried but left angry’, in the words of a State *Duma* deputy, Petr Tolstoy (United Russia), because they failed to receive answers to their most basic questions.⁵²

Nonetheless, on 20 April, the draft law passed the first reading at the State *Duma*. The criticism of the bill by the opposition deputies and the promise by its authors and the State *Duma* chairman Viacheslav Volodin that much work would be done to amend it,⁵³ failed to calm public anger. Further information meetings organised by the Moscow government, this time with the district heads (*prefekty okrugov*) on 26 April, turned into local rallies. The media reported that anti-renovation opposition among the Muscovites planned further protests in May (Grobman 2017).

At this point President Putin intervened, following a damning report by the Presidential Council on Human Rights and Civil Society (PCHRCS), an advisory structure to the Russian president comprised of NGOs’ representatives, which had an experience of mediating between the government and societal demands, particularly in the case of the protests by long-haul drivers’ during the winter of 2015–2016 (Flikke 2018, pp. 439–40). The PCHRCS report highlighted that the original draft of the renovation programme violated citizens’ rights and freedoms, including the right to challenge executive decisions

⁵⁰State *Duma* deputy Galina Khovanskaya (Just Russia) during the renovation bill second reading, plenary session 47, 9 June 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017b).

⁵¹Response by State *Duma* deputy Nikolai Gonchar (United Russia), one of the authors of the renovation bill to a question by Sergey Shargunov, during the first reading of the bill, 20 April 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017a).

⁵²Addresses by State *Duma* deputy Petr Tolstoy during the first reading of the renovation bill, 20 April 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017a).

⁵³Concluding remarks by Nikolay Gonchar, Evgeniy Moskvichev and the State *Duma* Chairman Viacheslav Volodin during the first reading of the bill on renovation, 20 April 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017a).

in court, and warned that the renovation policy was damaging the authorities' popularity and even risked the destabilisation of Moscow. The timing, during the symbolic year of the centenary of the Russian revolution, was sensitive for the government. Putin made a public statement warning that the programme must safeguard the rights of Muscovites, otherwise he would not sign the law (Khamraev 2017). Following this, on 2 May, the *Duma* speaker Viacheslav Volodin signalled that the policy process could be delayed by suggesting that the second reading of the bill might not take place until July (Khamraev 2017).

The pressure on the Moscow administration to improve the regime's popularity and to supply elites with business opportunities, however, was mounting as the municipal elections approached in September 2017 and the presidential ones the following year. The Moscow government decided to press on with the renovation initiative, turning to more open public consultation and making tangible concessions. Key Moscow decision-makers took seriously the advice from city officials and experts working on urban issues to allow constructive public participation in renovation decisions. For instance, in late April 2017, *Moskmarkhitektury* announced a series of tenders for renovation projects that involved comprehensive public hearings and consultations with local residents.⁵⁴ The Moscow City *Duma*, which also consulted urban experts (including Moscow's chief architect), urged the State *Duma* legislators to restore public consultations over the renovation programme adoption and further in the course of its implementation.⁵⁵

In mid-May, following the largest renovation protest, the Moscow administration made a more candid response. The main designers of the policy, Sobyenin and Khusnullin, gave long interviews to the reputable *RBK*⁵⁶ and *Ekho Moskvy*⁵⁷ news outlets, trying to persuade Muscovites to support their plans. They emphasised in particular that the construction industry would act as a subcontractor, with the Moscow government funding the programme (R3.5 trillion over 15 years) and undertaking the rehousing. Although the construction industry complained that the programme would be less profitable as a result of these changes (Aminov & Mertsalova 2017, p. 1), in the context of a stagnating economy, the project still offered them ample opportunities.

More productive meetings with the district *prefekty* or officials with discussion and questioning of officials, took place in the second half of May.⁵⁸ Consultations deepened

⁵⁴See, 'V Moskve nazvali pobeditelei arkhitekturnogo konkursa po renovatsii', *RBK*, 26 September 2018, available at: <https://realty.rbc.ru/news/5bab68f09a79473477a68fd7>; 'V Moskve zapustili publichnye slushaniya po pervym proektam renovatsii', *RBK*, 28 March 2019 available at: <https://realty.rbc.ru/news/5c9ccae49a7947334fd9ee91>, both accessed 17 May 2021.

⁵⁵See the report on the renovation draft law, especially paragraph 4 concerning public hearings, Moscow City *Duma*, 13 April 2017. See 'Otzyvy', 'Zakonoproekt N. 120505-7', *Sistema Obespecheniya Zakonodatel'noy Deyatel'nosti*, State *Duma* website, available at: https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/120505-7#bh_comments, accessed 17 May 2021.

⁵⁶'Vlasti Moskvy poobeshchali ne puskat' developerov v programme renovatsii', *RBK*, 19 May 2017, available at: <https://realty.rbc.ru/news/591f4b989a79475d6de3e2f8>, accessed 26 May 2020.

⁵⁷Aleksei Venediktov interviews Sergei Sobyenin, *Ekho Moskvy*, 16 June 2017, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxFFcxaXe7Q>, accessed 1 June 2020.

⁵⁸See, 'Programmu renovatsii zhil'ya obsudyat na vstrechakh s prefektami okrugov', Mayor of Moscow office website, 26 April 2017, available at: <https://www.mos.ru/news/item/23232073/>, accessed 17 May 2021; also, 'Sankt-Peterburg tozhe na bolote postroili—i nichego: Stolichnye prefekty obsudili programmu renovatsii', *Kommersant*, 18 May 2017, available at: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3299404>, accessed 17 May 2021.

as public hearings were organised at the State *Duma* on 6 June, involving nearly 400 *khrushchevki* residents, recruited by State *Duma* deputies from Moscow in their constituencies. During the hearings, *khrushchevki* dwellers posed uncomfortable questions to Mayor Sobyanin, Vice Prime Minister Dmitry Kozak and Minister of Construction Mikhail Men'. Several participants in these hearings were invited to take part in the renovation bill working group. Moreover, the group was to become a permanent body for the duration of the seventh *Duma*, to supervise the implementation of the programme. Similar public hearings were held on 13 June at the Moscow Public Chamber with the participation of the deputies of the Moscow City *Duma*.⁵⁹ The hearings channelled demands expressed during the protests into the policy process and gave assurances that the public input would be taken seriously.

During the second reading of the renovation bill on 9 June, over 130 amendments were adopted. These contained significant concessions to public demands. Rehousing was to be done only within the same municipal district, into 'equally priced' (*ravnotsennoe*) new housing and with the option to choose monetary compensation instead. New housing would be decorated to what was called a 'comfortable' standard of interior decoration, and help moving would be offered to socially vulnerable households. The residents of communal apartments would be rehoused in small separate apartments and the sequence of rehousing would begin with the most run-down buildings. The right to dispute in court the decisions involved in the renovation programme was restored.

The bill was finally adopted in the third reading by the *Duma* on 14 June and signed by Putin on 1 July. An important concession made under the pressure from the Muscovites, as Sobyanin emphasised in the *Ekho Moskvy* interview, was the extension of voting on the programme—by having meetings of building residents—for one more month, until mid-July 2017. Thus, 4,062 buildings were included in the programme *via* the 'Active Citizen'/MFTs vote, and a further 1,082 based on the decisions of the meetings of building residents. This allowed residents of dilapidated housing overlooked by the earlier version of the programme to be included in the renovation list. The final list was published on 1 August and comprised 5,144 buildings.⁶⁰

In sum, while the policy of Moscow urban development, as during the previous stages, responded to political and economic interests and expert ideas, during the adoption of the renovation programme the relationship between the authorities and the public changed. The deepening of participatory activity and the shift from the superficial public consultation of the early renovation initiative to discussions with the public that led to substantive concessions, allowed the programme to be adopted and its implementation to begin. Polls suggest that in 2019, Muscovites (74%) generally approved the city administration renovation plans (Levada Centre 2019). The renovation programme case

⁵⁹'Na Moskovskom grazhdanskom forume proshli obshchestvennye slushaniya po voprosu zashchity prav Moskvichei pri realizatsii programmy renovatsii', *Obshchestvennaya Palata goroda Moskvy*, 14 June 2017, available at: <https://opmoscow.ru/ru-RU/news/default/card/248.html>, accessed 17 May 2021. Also, address by State *Duma* deputy Petr Tolstoy at the third reading of the renovation bill, State *Duma* plenary session 48, 14 June 2017 (Gosudarstvennaya Duma 2017c).

⁶⁰'Sobyanin poobseshchal rasselit' zhitely moskovskikh khrushchevok do 32 goda', *RBK*, 1 August 2017, available at: <https://realty.rbc.ru/news/59804fed9a794716ae8dbeb6>, accessed 30 May 2020.

shows that, reluctantly, the principle of controlled pluralism in Moscow governance, which originally involved business elites, bureaucratic and expert circles, was extended to include consequential—albeit controlled—participation by the public.

Conclusion

This essay has demonstrated that the controversial programme of Moscow renovation involved an accommodation of different types of bureaucratic, economic and expert interests and ideas. The policy process based on bargaining between bureaucratic factions, expert opinion and industry involvement is a well-developed topic in the Russian studies literature (Fortescue 2017; Martus 2017; Khmel'nitskaya 2017b). Nevertheless, our analysis also established that ideas and interests can be accommodated over time: new solutions do not reverse the earlier ones but are 'layered', a mode of institutional development noted by historical institutionalists.


Further, the case of Moscow renovation supports the findings of those scholars who argue that in Russia public preferences can be accommodated through consultation (Owen & Bindman 2019). This is different from the more usual 'proxy' representation of public preferences by the respective blocs within the government. Crucial factors that allowed this mode of participation to take place were, first, the belief among at least some Moscow officials that local communities should be included in decisions on urban development. Second, equally important was the strength of collective action by Muscovites. Once the authorities moved to allow public participation, it took place *via* established institutional structures, in online and 'real time' consultations. Similar to the processes described in the context of China (He & Warren 2011), the Moscow protests represented an important form of public feedback for the government (Cook & Dimitrov 2017).

In this essay, we developed one of Regina Smyth's conclusions on the multifunctional nature of the Moscow renovation policy. We argue that this multifunctionality is associated with the accommodation of different interests and ideas over a period of time. There is a degree of spontaneity and open-endedness in this process. Nonetheless, by allowing the participation of different groups, the authorities retained their hold on power and a true representation of interests remained beyond reach (Jayasuriya & Rodan 2007). Moreover, such 'controlled pluralism' generates a flexible governance style characteristic not only of Moscow urban governance but also of contemporary Russia, particularly with respect to economic and social issues.

Linked to this point, another observation is methodological and relates to the study of the stability of authoritarian regimes afforded by their policies. Studying the effects of policy on authoritarian survival can be difficult using quantitative methodology. Because with this methodological approach, to quote Jennifer Gandhi again, 'Measuring policy polarization between the dictator and opposition is difficult in part because policies are many and preferences are unobservable' (Gandhi 2008, p. 94). Our analysis shows that, in order to unpack the multifunctional nature of policies, we need to examine different groups of actors involved and affected by policy in various ways—national and local policy bureaucrats, experts, economic interests and the public. Timing is also important. How

interests are accommodated and actors rewarded needs to be viewed through the prism of a historical dynamic, as the policy process unfolds.

Finally, our study pointed to many avenues for further research. One of them could investigate the hypotheses by ‘Wallace’ mentioned earlier in this essay. Would the policy of pumping resources into the Moscow housing market generate unexpected political consequences? How will the political views and behaviour of Muscovites change, as many new residents, including from outside of the city, move to its renovated areas where *khrushchevki* are being demolished?

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